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SIPDIS
DEPARTMENT FOR S/GWI AND WHA

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TAGS: PHUM KWMN PREL KPAO BL
SUBJECT: BOLIVIAN NOMINATION: THE 2010 SECRETARY'S AWARD FOR
INTERNATIONAL WOMEN OF COURAGE

REF: STATE 016553

¶1. Per REFTEL, Embassy La Paz nominates Dr. Marina Flores Villena for the 2010 Secretary's Award for International Women of Courage. Through her work as a lawyer and public prosecutor, Marina has dedicated herself professionally and personally to positively impacting the lives of hundreds of Bolivian women and children victims of domestic violence and sexual exploitation. She is aware of the nomination and is willing to accept the award if chosen.

¶2. Nominee: Dr. Marina Flores Villena

Job Title/Association: Prosecutor, Santa Cruz District
Prosecutor's Office

Date of Birth: March 23, 1960

Country of Birth: Bolivia

Country of Citizenship: Bolivia

Address: Barrio Guaracachi Calle 9, Santa Cruz

Telephone: (591) 766 81245 or (591) 726 84076

Passport #: 1795067

Language: Spanish

¶3. Marina was born in a small village near Tarija, Bolivia. She grew up with her five brothers until the age of nine when her mother and father died, leaving the six kids alone. The two eldest brothers tried to raise the younger children but their lack of financial resources forced them to send Marina to live with relatives. Marina finished elementary school in a rural village where there was no possibility for a high school education. She begged her aunt to send her to the city of Tarija to continue her education. The aunt agreed but she couldn't pay for Marina's schooling. As a result, at the age of 13, Marina moved to Tarija to work as a house maid by day and attend school in the evenings. She finished her high school education and moved to Santa Cruz, a larger city, in search of more opportunities. There she worked as a house maid and entered a university where she received a partial scholarship. She later found a job as an assistant in a dentist's office where she worked until she finished her studies in law at University Gabriel Rene Moreno. She told Embassy La Paz she now remembers those difficult days with joy because she achieved what was most import in her life - an education - something that seemed almost impossible for women from rural areas in that era.

¶4. Marina began her legal career working in the Santa Cruz

Prefect's Office for the Defense of Children, assisting women and children victims of domestic violence and sexual exploitation. Due to the office's lack of resources, Marina had to work extra hard to rescue victims and to find them better living environments - often donating her spare time and personal resources to make a real difference in their lives. Despite the challenges, she told Embassy La Paz she deeply appreciated being able to assist women and children in need. A few years later she began working for Defense for Children International, an NGO where she performed similar work advocating for the needs of child abuse victims. She later joined the Santa Cruz District Prosecutor's Office where she helped the Bolivian government implement a new criminal code procedure respecting human rights. Her accomplishments led her to be elected as a prosecutor, where her record continues to stand out as one of the most successful in obtaining convictions in cases of rape and sexual exploitation. One of Marina's most high-profile cases involved the conviction of a Bolivian couple that trafficked six girls to Santa Cruz for purposes of sexual exploitation. Only four such convictions related to trafficking have ever been achieved in Bolivia.

¶15. In a country where the judicial branch is considered one of the most corrupt public institutions, Marina is known by her colleagues and the police as the "incorruptible prosecutor." A single mother with a limited salary as a public official, she is widely respected for her honesty and courage. Marina works closely with Casa Jacinta, a Catholic shelter that provides refuge for women and children victims of domestic violence and others in need.

The shelter's manager told Embassy La Paz, "Marina has never lost a case. She has helped many victims put their offender in jail - in a country with a long history of impunity in these kinds of cases." Marina has also worked with the Bolivian police advising them on best practices for dealing with victims of sexual abuse, leading the effort to create a special unit for the police to assist victims of sexual abuse. Marina has also taken a vocal role in fighting corruption within her own institution, occasionally receiving threats to her personal safety.

¶16. In researching this nomination, Embassy La Paz learned of numerous victims of abuse and exploitation that are today attending school or university because of Marina's professional and personal commitment. One young woman, Noelia, a rape victim at the age of ten who is now 19, told us, "I received from Marina the love and affection that I never had from my family. When I met Marina I felt I was no longer alone in life."

¶17. Embassy La Paz appreciates the Department's consideration of this nomination. Officer responsible for the nomination: E.J. Monster, Cultural Affairs Officer, MonsterEJ@state.gov, (591 2) 216 8422, IVG 547-8863.
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